

# Lake Erie welcomes new Sailors to Fleet

**Ens. Domenic Carlucci**  
*USS Lake Erie PAO*

In an urgent effort to achieve the Chief of Naval Operations 25 percent reduction in first term Sailor attrition, USS Lake Erie (CG 70) recently established the New Sailor Transition Program (NSTP). NSTP is designed to set Sailors up for success during the critical first year of their sea duty assignment.

“Our analysis of Sailors who were prematurely separated from the Navy revealed a consistent, almost invariable set of common denominators which foreshadowed failure,” said Command Master Chief Steve Harbers.

“We specifically designed the NSTP to provide Sailors with the skills and experience they needed to be successful in transitioning to a challenging culture of career long learning, courage, honor, commitment, physical fitness, and service to others.”

Life at sea is a fast paced, academically challenging, physically demanding, and in many cases presents Sailors with a change in moral and ethical standards. For those who have not acquired the skills, experience, and confidence to cope with the new culture, the transition to sea duty service can be overwhelming.

NC1 Reuben Hilerio of New York City, N.Y., Lake Erie’s Career Counselor and Chief Operating Officer of the NSTP said, “While recruit training and apprenticeship training are great first steps to becoming a successful Sailor, they are of short duration and often don’t provide all of the skills and experience which Sailors need to thrive on their first sea duty assignment.”

In the past, the magnitude and duration of the effort required to help Sailors transition has been underestimated. NSTP is a long-term program designed to significantly boost academic skills, physical readiness, mature insight, and life coping skills. Instead of waiting for the Sailor to fail, we analyze their prospects for success at the very start and provide the remedi-

al skills up front. The concept is very much like that employed at universities with high freshmen retention rates. Students with promise, but potential deficiencies, are accepted conditionally with the understanding that they participate in remedial programs before and during their freshman year.

Early contact with new shipmates is the first step. Because traditional methods of contact such as mailed welcome aboard packages have been less than reliable, the ship’s website includes a virtual welcome aboard package with over 95 percent contact rate. The website includes a survey that helps match up the Sailor with “best fit” sponsors and mentors who have taken the Meyers Briggs personality indicator test. Mentorship is long term and unique in that it assigns mentors outside of the Sailor’s chain of command.

Once onboard, new Sailors immediately begin the first phase of indoctrination without the delay associated with the traditional Indoctrination Division concept, which typically convenes only when a sufficient number of new Sailors have reported. There was a large dissatisfaction rate among those that had been onboard for three months and were being taught things they had already learned or wish they had learned long ago. Training is provided in areas such as PQS, personal finance, ship familiarization, damage control, and Naval Station orientation in the critical first 72 hours.

A second phase is conducted monthly with in-depth training. The “How to Study” course is particularly important to the program. “We found that only about 10 percent of the new Sailors had any kind of study skills program in high school,” said Petty Officer Hillario.

In an environment where watch qualification, advancement training, and college courses are rapidly becoming more and more important, it was imperative to provide our Sailors with the ability to rapidly and thoroughly access and re-



File photo

tain a great deal of information. The course is taught by Lt. j.g. Brian Ellis, a Naval Academy graduate, who taught courses at the Naval Academy Preparatory School in Newport, R.I. prior to reporting to Lake Erie.

The opportunity to advance was further boosted by the Command-wide advancement program that prescribes mandatory study time from 7-8 a.m. each day and draws on CNET websites, CD’s and other learning tools.

Phase II also includes instruction on marriage in the military taught by Lt. Cmdr. Van Dickens, Lake Erie’s Chaplain.

Spouses are invited for a day and participate in a tour of the base, receive presentations from the Fleet and Family Support Center, the Navy Marine Corps Relief Society, Chaplain, and the command financial advisor. They also meet with the Ombudsman and the command’s senior leadership.

The third phase exposes Sailors to Navy Life Skills Programs such

as Bearings, CREDO, and PRE-VENT. This phase provides Sailors the opportunity to complete Basic Damage Control qualification as well as additional ship wide PQS.

Undesignated seamen are no longer sent automatically to Deck Division. Instead, they are assigned to another division in the ship. “We want to do our best to fulfill the expectations created in the Sailors mind by the recruiting command and boot camp,” said Master Chief Harbers.

The often disappointing letdown when the Sailors arrive to immediately begin food service attendant duties for the first three months of their tours before they get a chance to accelerate their careers is one of the main reasons why many Sailors don’t complete their initial enlistment. On Lake Erie, Sailors are only assigned Food Service Attendant duties after they have successfully completed basic qualifications and been with a division for two months.

Recognizing the overwhelmingly

positive effect that sports can have on teamwork and self-confidence, the ship’s physical fitness routine was modified from a routine calisthenics and running program to a sport oriented fitness program.

“Sports are life in miniature,” said Lt. j.g. Christian Wahlgren. “With the decline in the number of physical education programs around the country, and the general lack of participation in team sports by many new Sailors, we felt that we can significantly improve fitness, morale, and confidence with an innovative sports program,” said Wahlgren.

Now all new Sailors get advanced instruction in swimming and sailing. The first group of 10 Sailors fully qualified to operate 22-foot sailboats will graduate next week.

The New Sailor Transition Program is breaking new ground in the way that Fleet Sailors are developed and educated. It offers them the required support, providing a great start to a hopefully promising career.